



## WINSpirational Reading

Debra Benton is a *New York Times* bestselling McGraw-Hill Professional author, speaker, and executive coach who has inspired business leaders in every industry to become more effective leaders. Author of the books *Secrets of a CEO Coach*, *Executive Charisma*, *How to Act Like a CEO* and her latest, *CEO Material*, Debra recently talked with *WINSpirations* about how we can stand out as leaders in these times of change.

### **Can you tell us about your experience working with CEOs?**

I interviewed about 2000 people over eight years and compared the factors when two people start out on the same footing in their career in terms of ambition and education but, over time, one goes much farther than the other. I found the differences are in how you relate and how you act. I've written eight books about these issues. It is what I eat, sleep and breathe! I have done three trips around the world consulting and speaking, and I have worked in 18 different countries. I've worked with many Fortune 500 companies and I have helped people prepare for interviews with Donald Trump, for meetings with presidents, for presidential campaigns, and for presentations before Congress.

### **What traits make for good "CEO material"?**

Character, ethics, ambition, curiosity, energy, drive, having the guts to make decisions, the ability to guide people, and the guts to speak up when you feel something needs to be corrected. But if I had to list one it would be self-confidence. My definition of confidence is "I'm adequate and I think other people are adequate," and not "I am better than everyone else."

### **How does someone cultivate confidence?**

You can start this by expecting acceptance for what you bring to the table—for your existence and for your contributions. You have a God-given right to be here, to be working, to be contributing, to be advising. If you don't expect acceptance people won't give it to you and if you do, they just might. That comes from "self-talk": "I'm adequate and working on getting better" instead of "I'm inadequate." People have approximately 50,000 thoughts running through their minds on a daily basis and a lot of it is negative "self-talk." You have to stop and correct these thoughts with "I'm adequate." This helps confidence, and causes people to believe in you.

### **How can every person help pave the way for good leaders to emerge?**

Do all you can to maintain the self esteem of others. Give acceptance to people. You don't have to tolerate bad behavior, but don't attack another person's character.

### **The title of Chapter 14 in *CEO Material*, "You are Willing to Make Mistakes" seems very important. Can you tell us why mistakes should be embraced?**

Many people tell me the only learning they had in life came from making mistakes. People don't learn when everything is OK. Confident people don't fear mistakes. They actually want to make them.

### **Do you have any advice for identifying one's passion?**

Even 60 and 70 year olds ask themselves "what am I going to do when I grow up?" Few people are lucky to find their passion early on and make a life and living from doing it. Even though I have been lucky to do that, I still question and wonder what else I could be doing or if I should be doing something differently. Constantly read, talk to people, and check out other things to see what interests you. Always look for ideas. It has to be something others want if you decide to make a living off of it. A wise mentor once said to me "whatever you want to offer people as a service or product, make sure they want it, too."

### **We loved your "Years' Worth of To-Do Items." What's the most important thing we should do from this list to improve our chances of promotion and advancement?**

Every day, initiate a phone call, note, letter or e-mail to someone you didn't need to contact that day (an e-mail to your boss doesn't count). It could be a mentor that you haven't touched base with in a while—re-connect and let that person know what you are up to and how much they helped you in your career. Or, for example, if you're looking at the newspaper and see someone is doing work with children in Darfur and you believe in that cause, Google that writer and let them know you read their article. You should do this seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. In 365 days, you will have established contact or re-connected with 365 people. It's all about connections and networking. Take the initiative. Get out of your comfort zone. *Do something different.*

For more information on Debra Benton, please visit her Web site: [www.DebraBenton.com](http://www.DebraBenton.com) and follow her on Twitter [@debrabenton](https://twitter.com/debrabenton). • • •

